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Research on the Present Situation of Primary and Secondary Teachers' Professional Ethics in China

XIE Ou^{[a],*}

^[a]School of History and Culture, Southwestern University, Chongqing, China.

*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

Teachers' professional ethics is a core element in the professional development of teachers. Through the survey, it is found that currently there are some problems in the professional ethical construction of primary and secondary teachers in China. There is an imbalance between "justice" and "profit" for teachers in the process of professional ethical construction. Therefore, we should not only stimulate teachers' ethical needs in the construction of professional ethics and advocate the unification of teachers' utilitarian spirit and the spirit of dedication, but also establish and improve the reward and punishment mechanism for teachers' professional ethics, providing ethical rewards for teachers from a practical perspective so as to promote the development of teachers' professional ethics in China.

Key words: Primary and secondary teachers; Professional ethics; Survey

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INTRODUCTION

To educate people, morality goes first. Education, as a social activity which guides people to be "kind", naturally has a moral attribute. Teachers are educators and their behavior must be moral. Especially in the times background of the professionalism of teachers, teachers' professional ethics are not only the core content and

powerful support of teachers' professional development, but also an important symbol to test whether a teacher has finished the professionalism. To grasp the present situation of teachers' professional ethical construction and explore the problems of and effective solutions to teachers' professional ethical construction is of great significance for the development of teachers' professionalism in China. Therefore, we selected teachers from six primary and secondary schools in China as the research object to analyze and conclude the current general situation of the professional ethics of primary and secondary teachers in this province and the behavior choice tendency of primary and secondary teachers when faced with a conflict between justice and profit as well as to observe and reflect the existing problems in teachers' professional ethics so as to provide realistic basis for the approach to construct teachers' professional ethics. The aim of the research is to provide a practical reference for the construction of teachers' professional ethics in China.

1. THE RESEARCH METHOD

1.1 The Research Tool

The questionnaire consists of three parts: teachers' basic information, the current situation of teachers' professional ethics, and teachers' behavior choice. Wherein the second part, "survey of the current situation of the teacher's professional ethics", it is designed from the four dimensions of teachers' professional ethics, that is, teachers and their students, teachers and their colleagues, teachers and students' parents, teachers and schools & society. There are 22 questions in total in this part and it is analyzed by using Likert scale. In the third part, "teachers' behavior choice", frequency analysis is mainly conducted with the aim to get to know how teachers deal with the students' interests, collective interests and personal interests when facing conflicts between justice and profit and their attitude towards current teachers' moral ethics so as to explore the existing problems in teachers'

professional ethics and the reasons for the imbalance between justice and profit.

1.2 The Research Object

We selected part of teachers from six primary and secondary schools in China as the research objects and distributed 220 questionnaires in total. 212 questionnaires were returned and the return rate is 96.36%. Among them, 209 questionnaires are effective and the effective rate is %98.58. The sample characteristics of the research objects are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
The Sample Characteristics of the Research Objects

Sample characteristics	Quantity	Proportion %	Total
<u>Gender</u>	Male	81	38.8
	Female	128	61.2
<u>Age</u>	Under 25	53	25.4
	25-35	85	40.7
	35-45	45	21.5
	Above 45	26	12.4
<u>Years of teaching</u>	5 years or less	53	25.4
	5-10 years	92	44.0
	10-20 years	48	23.0
	More than 20 years	16	7.6
<u>S c h o o l Type</u>	Primary school	72	34.5
	Junior high school	77	36.8
	Senior high school	60	28.7
<u>S c h o o l ranking</u>	Magnet school	113	54.0
	Normal school	96	46.0
	Vocational diploma	23	11.0
<u>Educational background</u>	Associate degree	42	20.1
	BA	127	60.8
	MA	17	8.1
<u>Household average Annual income per Person</u>	Low income (0-12,109 yuan)	49	23.4
	Middle income (12,110-29,876 Yuan)	138	66.1
	High (29,877 yuan and above)	22	10.5

Note. The group classification of teachers' household income levels is based on the data provided by China Statistical Yearbook 2011 on the basic income situation of urban residents in 2010. In this yearbook, the income of urban residents is divided into seven levels: the lowest income household (6,703.70 yuan), low income household (10,247.04 yuan), lower-middle income household (13,970.99 Yuan), middle income household (18,920.72 yuan), upper middle income household (25,497.81 yuan), high income household (34254.64 Yuan), and the highest income household (56,435.17 yuan). We use the median of the total average annual income per person in two adjacent income household groups as the critical value to divide the income household group of teachers. In this way, the teachers' household income level is divided into seven groups: the lowest income household (0-8475 yuan), low income household (8,475-12,109 yuan), lower-middle income household (12,109-16,446 yuan), middle income household (16,446-22,209 yuan), upper-middle income household (22,209-29,876 yuan), high income household (29,876-45,345 yuan) and the highest income household (45,345 yuan and above). when reporting the income level in the above table, the research team re-divided them into three groups: low level of household income group (including the lowest income household and low income household), moderate level of household income group (including lower-middle, middle, and upper-middle income households), and high level of household income group (including high and the highest income households).

1.3 The Research Procedure

1) Preliminary interviews. We selected 50 teachers from six primary and secondary schools in China to conduct a semi-structured interview in depth and then combining with the interview results we prepared the survey questionnaire.

2) Formal survey testing. Select research objects to conduct the survey questionnaire.

3) Collection and analysis of the results. Collect and sort the result data of the questionnaire and conduct statistical analysis.

4) Data processing. In this research, all the data are sorted by using EXCEL2003 and SPSS13.0.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEY RESULTS

2.1 The Overall Situation of Teachers' Professional Ethics

From the professional ethical level that the surveyed teachers show, primary and secondary teachers' professional ethical performance level to students is the highest and its mean is 22.96 (Table 1). In the six questions in the aspect of students, the leading role of teachers ($M=2.29$) and the individual cognitive difference level ($M=2.25$) of students are the highest (Table 2). However, teachers still have some educational behavior which is disadvantageous to the development of students to some extent. The mean of this question is 2.21. In general, in the primary and secondary teacher group surveyed, teachers' professional ethical level to students is at a higher level; however, there are some educational ways which are not beneficial to the development of students. Therefore, teachers need to improve their educational methods and use appropriate ways which suit the group characteristics of primary and secondary schoolchildren to educate them so as to better serve students and then promote the healthy development of students.

Table 2
The Overall Scoring of Secondary School Teachers' Professional Ethical Performance

Aspect	Quantity	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Students	209	12.00	29.00	22.96	3.63
Parents	209	10.00	25.00	19.54	3.33
Colleagues	209	8.00	25.00	18.50	3.18
School and society	209	13.00	25.00	20.50	2.81
Total	209				

The aspect of interaction and communication with parents is at a moderate level and the overall mean is 19.54. In the content of the questionnaire, the mean of teacher-parent communication frequency, good communication way, interaction with right attitude is respectively 2.31, 2.14 and 2.14 and they are in a balanced state. However, there is such a phenomenon that some teachers propose unreasonable demands to parents. The

mean of this question is only 1.78, the lowest level in this aspect.

Table 3
The Average Scoring of Primary and Secondary Teachers' Professional Ethical Performance

Aspect	Mean of each question					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Students (6 questions)	2.05	2.12	2.25	2.29	2.21	2.11
Parents (5 questions)	2.31	2.14	2.14	2.1	1.78	
Colleagues (5 questions)	2.13	2.69	2.38	2.39	1.9	
School and society (5 questions)	1.86	1.87	1.8	1.83	2.13	

As for the aspect of treating their colleagues, teachers' professional ethical level presents the lowest level with an average of 18.50, among which inappropriate competitive behavior between teachers is the worst with an average of only 1.9. From this we can see that there is not a healthy competitive atmosphere among teachers and there is some competitive behavior in private that is not beneficial to the healthy development of the teachers' profession.

In the aspect of treating the school and society, the average score of this aspect in the primary and secondary teacher group surveyed is 20.50. This shows that, in the four aspects of teachers' professional ethical performance, the professional ethical level in treating the school and society is at a high level in the four aspects.

2.2 Teachers' Attitude to "Justice" and "Profit"

From the analysis of "the teacher's attitude to education", "the teacher's attitude to the pursuit of personal interests", "the teacher's attitude to the interests of students and the collective interests" and "the teacher's attitude to teachers' professional ethics", it shows that the majority of teachers hold a very positive attitude towards the pursuit of personal interests, but there are very few teachers who seriously deviate from the meaning of education on this issue and even tend to acquire personal improper interests at the expense of the interests of students and the collective interests. Therefore, we can find out the conflict in current teachers' professional ethics. There is a contrast between teachers' actual performance of the professional ethical level in professional activities and their attitude towards personal interests, that is, the actual level of teachers' professional ethics we see from the survey is not from the true feelings of most teachers. We also need to specially note that, according to the result of the survey, most teachers believe that the current teachers' ethical requirements don't protect their personal interests very well, so they are forced to comply to the teachers' ethical requirements because of concerns of punishment and public opinions. This shows that, on the one hand the current teachers' ethical requirements don't get recognized by teachers, even "impose" themselves on teachers and teachers' ethical requirements don't really get internalized;

on the other hand, while most teachers force to accept the current teachers' ethical requirements, their heart is full of contradictions and confusion, leading to possible immoral behavior. In general, currently it is difficult for teachers to accurately understand and handle "justice" and "profit".

In Table 4, we conduct a further multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) of the professional ethical level scoring of teacher groups with different income level. The analysis result shows that, there exist significant differences of the professional ethical level that teachers with different income level present in each aspect. The professional ethical level of teachers with higher income is significantly higher than that of the teachers with lower income.

Table 4
Comparison of the Professional Ethical Scoring of Teachers With Different Income Levels

Aspect	Low income (Q=49)		Moderate income (Q=138)		High income (Q=22)		F	p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Student	21.04	4.5	23.26	3.13	25.32	2.32	13.369	.000
Parents	17.53	3.72	19.96	3.02	21.41	2.09	15.370	.000
Colleagues	17.18	3.53	18.72	2.95	20.05	2.89	7.574	.001
School and society	19.49	3.29	20.54	2.6	22.5	1.65	9.463	.000

Note: $p < 0.05$ means the difference is of statistical significance.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE REASONS FOR THE PROBLEMS OF TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

The research results show that there are some problems in the present situation of primary and secondary teachers' professional ethics in China. There are some differences between teachers and even in teachers' professional life, there is an imbalance between justice and profit. The reasons mainly lie in the following aspects.

3.1 Misinterpretation of Bounded Rationality Leading to Confusion of Values

New Institutional Economics believes that people have a "bounded rationality", that is, under the restriction of bounded rationality, people in real life is to seek the satisfaction of interests rather than the pursuit of the best (Williamson, 2002). For teachers, seeking legitimate interests is extremely common and understandable. However, it has long been proposed that requirements to teachers are always based on the highest standards of ethics. It supposes that teachers have unbounded rationality while ignoring teachers' bounded rationality. Therefore, all reasonable profit seeking behavior of teachers is disallowed and rejected; otherwise teachers will be criticized under the "accusation" of "misconduct",

which, to some extent, has led to anxiousness and confusion for teachers in the choice of personal values. Clearly, in the contradiction between the “economic person” of teachers and the pure “moral person” that people expect of teachers, teachers are confused and puzzled about profit seeking and moral orientation and it is difficult for them to properly handle “justice” and “profit”. Therefore, it is inevitable that currently teachers’ professional ethical level is at a lower level and to enhance the process of teachers’ professional development is impossible.

3.2 Miscalculating the Costs and Benefits Leading to Professional Ethical Alienation

New Institutional Economics believes that the choice of personal action programs depends on their “economic” motives and in the process of making a decision, they must try to get the maximum benefits while paying the minimum costs. A person is the profit seeker as well as the judge of their own interests. Therefore, what educational costs to pay and what educational benefits to get is not only the issue that school administrators should carefully check, but also the problem that needs to be weighed in teachers’ professional activities, and this will directly affect the development of teachers’ professional ethical literacy.

Essentially, education is a social activity to cultivate people. Therefore, fundamentally the interest of education is to cultivate what kind of people. For a long time, focusing on the cultivation of “knowledge-based people” is the consistent educational orientation in China. “To shape knowledge-based people is a deep-rooted educational creed and the setting of human nature from this creed is to take knowledge and knowledge pursuit as the only prescriptive nature of people”. Therefore, highly effective knowledge transfer and high level of admission rate to a better higher school are often the main objectives pursued by schools and what schools seek is the external benefits and practical values these bring. Driven by this utilitarian purpose, exam-oriented education has prevailed for a long time and even today it is still so. The teacher group continues to suffer the erosion and impact of adverse social orientation and the excessive pursuit of practical benefits, making the issue of teachers’ professional ethics gradually disappears from sight. For teachers themselves, under the dual pressures of survival and competition, it is difficult for teachers to take into account of the value of their professional ethics in their career. With the overall goal of education by taking “scores” and “admission rate to a better higher school” as the highest pursuit, teachers have to comply with it, and gradually alienate the pursuit the value and meaning of education cause. As a result, to enhance teachers’ professional ethics is far away and not in the foreseeable future.

3.3 Opportunistic Tend Leading to Seeking Illegitimate Interests

“Individual economic behavior has different subjective experience under different conditions and it shows a certain opportunistic trend—resourceful and opportunistic to

seek greater benefits for themselves”. As benefit seekers, one’s cost-benefit analysis of their own behavior is greatly situational. The opportunistic trend of teachers’ individual behavior does not only show in their daily behavior, but also gradually expands to their professional behavior.

Being able to obtain benefits for survival and development from a certain occupation or profession is an important motivation for people to choose to engage in such an occupation or profession. On this point of view, there is a certain relationship of interest between teachers, as individual, and their professional activities. As people existing in reality, teachers must have the requirements to realize individual interests and values; therefore, they choose to become a teacher. Therefore, we can assume that, if teachers don’t seek personal interests at the expense of the interests of students, the development of the school and the development of the cause of education in our country, this self-beneficial behavior should be reasonable. However, when teachers show a tendency to benefits in their professional activities, they show opportunistic tendencies. At this time, teachers will try to obtain as greater as possible “benefits” while paying as little as possible “price” through improper means. It should be irrefragable that teachers concern about their personal benefits; however, when some teachers take the advantage of their occupation or institutional omissions in their professional activities and make personal profit through dishonest means, it will lead to the appearance of power “rent-seeking”. For example, in order to facilitate their organizing tutoring classes or interest study groups through disguise and forced ways, some teacher deliberately “reserve” the teaching or “cut down” some part of their teaching in the school teaching; or they assign or sell a variety of books and learning materials to students to seek kickbacks; or they have some improper contact of interest with students’ parents and so on.

4. STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE THE CONSTRUCTION OF TEACHERS’ PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

Over the years, the achievement of the construction of teachers’ professional ethics in China is not satisfactory and it is filled with doubts and accusations in society regarding the current teachers’ professional ethical level. We should respect teachers’ legitimate personal interests on the basis of stimulating teachers’ ethical needs, promote the unification of teachers’ spirit of dedication and the utilitarian spirit, and construct the reward and punishment mechanism of teachers’ professional ethics to allow teachers to obtain ethical rewards that they deserve, without which, the construction of teachers’ professional ethics will continue to be vague, boring and inefficient.

4.1 Internalization of Teachers' Ethics: To Inspire Teachers' Ethical Needs

The formation of teachers' professional ethics is not only caused by "external forces" and to a large extent it depends on conducting of the way with ethics. Teachers' understanding, comprehension and pursuit of the "Way" determines whether teachers have ethics and how much they have as well as the power of how long they can put ethics into practice. To promote the construction of teachers' professional ethics, we should inspire the concept of kindness of teachers, not just limited to advising kindness to them. Further, we should guide teachers to constantly experience and understand the true meaning of the "Way" on the basis of their basically knowing the "Way" and then gradually transform to the self-cultivation of "being happy with the Way" and "love the Way". Teachers' professional ethics should become active and inherent vitality of teachers rather than an alien and dissident constraint. In order to reasonably uniform the power and responsibilities that teachers should have in their professional ethical practice and understanding, we must establish the dominant position of teachers and allow them to fully play their dominant roles rather than making them only become the object of the norms of professional ethics. The establishment of teachers' individual dominant position can not only make them consciously form the ability of self-dependence and self-discipline, but also inspire them to produce the intrinsic motivation of self-education and self-development. As Marx pointed out, "all power of people's movement must be converted to motive of their desire through their mind so as to make them take the action" ("The CPC Central Compilation". para. 5, 1995). To establish teachers' dominant position and enhance the self-cultivation, self-discipline and self-education of their ethical consciousness and moral quality can promote teachers to develop their own consciousness of ethical literacy. It also helps to internalize external professional ethical requirements into their own ethical needs so as to realize the sublimation of teachers' professional ethics from discipline to self-discipline. Teachers are no longer "moral robots" who mechanically comply with professional ethics, but try to achieve their ethical goals from their inner heart.

4.2 Return to Reality: To Advocate the Unification of the Spirit of Dedication and the Utilitarian Spirit

Today, ethics is no longer Plato's idealism or Hegel's rational regulation of absolute spiritual significance, nor is Kant's innate behavior moral precept. More likely, it accommodates emotions, instincts and passions (Zhang, 2001). The construction of teachers' professional ethics requires to break the "deification" of teachers and to return to "reality" from the "ideal" of traditional thoughts. To establish a correct point of view regarding justice and

profit is the primary task for the construction of teachers' professional ethics back to reality. The thought itself of rejecting teachers' interests is immoral. We should recognize the rationality of teachers' pursuit of personal interests, allow them to legitimately seek personal interests and overcome the tendency of "Pan Moralism" in traditional teacher evaluation. Only in this way can we promote to a greater extent the occurrence of teachers' ethical behavior. If only those actions for others and only for others are moral, there will not be any moral behavior at all (Zhang, 2001). However, if a teacher works entirely from the utilitarianism and pursues material comforts, it will be difficult for him to measure the scale of their own professional development. Teaching activities become a simple occupation for living so that ultimately he cannot experience the value of the teaching job with valuable missions and responsibilities of enlightenment and the happiness it brings. Therefore, in the construction of teachers' professional ethics, we should adhere to the unification of the spirit of dedication and the utilitarian spirit. We should guide teachers to consciously go beyond the utilitarianism and to restrict and regulate utilitarianism with dedication. When teachers realize their own social values, their realization of personal values can be of true significance.

4.3 Ethical Rewards: To Establish Reward and Punishment Mechanism of Teachers' Ethics to Protect the Interests of Teachers

The so-called ethical reward for teachers refers to material and spiritual rewards and punishment from organizations or individuals based on the evaluation of the motivation and effects of teachers' actions. The punishment is not simply restrictions. The aim of punishment is to inspire those punished to proactively analyze, judge and make a decision and ultimately form correct ethical thinking, judging and decision-making ability. When people can get more benefits if they are moral, morality is the goal that people pursue (Yao, 2000).

In order to establish teachers' ethical reward mechanism, we should firstly establish a standard evaluation system of teachers' ethical reward. This is an important prerequisite to ensure the smooth conduction of evaluation activities. The evaluation standards of ethical reward should be as specific as possible and practicable. Secondly, we should establish multiple evaluation methods. The evaluation methods of teachers' ethics are not immutable. Student evaluation, institutional evaluation, teachers' self-evaluation and social evaluation can constitute the evaluation methods of teachers' ethics. We should comprehensively and flexibly use each method based on the actual situation. Thirdly, we should establish the security system of teachers' ethical reward. In the construction of teachers' professional ethics, the establishment of security system of ethical reward is the key to achieve teachers' ethical reward. To achieve the

goal of awarding the kind and punishing the evil, to let misconduct teachers suffer material and spiritual loss, and to provide teachers with good professional ethics with real material and spiritual benefits will depend on institutionalized protective measures. In addition, we should improve the feedback system of teachers' ethical reward. This will help to not only deepen teachers' understanding and support of ethical reward, but also to improve and reform the ethical reward system. Through the process and result of feedback, teachers can further understand the realistic value of ethical reward and generate a consensus on ethical reward. In this way, the teacher group will provide more support to ethical reward system, which is advantageous to create an external environment of ethical reward that rewards the kind and punishes the evil so as to promote more teachers to conduct professional activities according to the "Way".

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